

INTERPRETIVE REPORT

Another Bomber Plan Loses

By RICHARD FRYKLUND
Star Staff Writer

The latest Air Force proposal for a new manned bomber has fallen just as flat as the previous one sent to Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara.

It's not that the civilians say they are opposed to bombers—on the contrary, McNamara insists that hundreds of existing strategic bombers will be continued in operation for the foreseeable future and that a new one will be approved if its need is ever demonstrated.

The new Air Force proposal, however, has failed to answer convincingly the questions raised about the need.

Another problem for the Air Force is that new national intelligence estimates, being readied for top administration consideration next week, convince many key officials that the Russians are not building a long-range fissile force sufficiently large or protected to make a new strategic bomber necessary.

Political Issue

Meanwhile, Sen. Barry Goldwater is making a political issue out of bombers. He has accused McNamara of planning to reduce strategic power by 90 percent.

McNamara has replied with statistics showing that present plans call for an increase in nuclear warheads over the next five years even without a new bomber.

The Air Force last month proposed that McNamara give tentative approval to an Advanced Manned Strategic Aircraft (AMSA) that would succeed present long-range bombers in the 1970s. The proposal estimated that 200 AMSAs would cost \$9 billion.

The Air Force wants immediate approval of engineering studies on the proposed new engines and navigation and fire control systems.

The study also proposes that the Air Force now be permitted to go into what the Pentagon calls the "project definition" phase of aircraft development. This is advanced design work that civilian officials believe commits them to final approval.

The request for this sort of tentative approval will be rejected. Defense officials say that the study phase has not been completed.

Air Force Argument

The Air Force does have money for continued studies and is encouraged to think that it will get more in next year's budget for engine and sub-system development. Civilian officials believe that his work will be useful in the future even if AMSA finally is rejected.

The Air Force based its new argument for a bomber largely on estimates of the American lives it would save during a war by destroying enemy missiles. The study emphasizes this possible war situation:

A war starts — by whatever unforeseeable means.

The Soviet Union strikes, attempting to destroy the United States' missile and bomber force but sparing American cities (knowing that the United States can destroy all Russian cities in retaliation.)

The Russian ICBMs that are protected under ground are aimed at American cities but not fired. The Kremlin tells the President on the hot line that if Russian cities are destroyed the withheld missiles will be fired.

American missiles destroy what Russian strategic forces they can, avoiding cities.

The AMSA force takes off, uses short-range, accurate missiles against the underground Russian missiles, and thus takes out the city-busting force.

The new bombers, by Air Force calculations, could save

many millions American lives.

A question is raised, however, whether the Russians really would withhold their city-destroying force while the AMSA bombers approached. If they fired their withheld weapons, AMSA would have little value.

Civilian analysts question whether \$9 billion worth of AMSA would save as many lives as \$9 billion worth of fallout shelters, anti-missile defenses, improved air defenses or the super-accurate ICBMs that are under study for use in the 1970s.

Comparative Study

The Air Force did compare AMSA's effectiveness with \$9 billion worth of Minuteman II missiles, but not with the other life-saving weapons. The planes looked good, compared with Minuteman II.

The civilians also ask if other bombers cannot do the AMSA job if the job is necessary.

Existing B-52 heavy bombers will be good through 1975, according to an Air Force-Defense Department-Boeing Co. study, and, with continual modernization, might last into the '80s.

Only 200 bombers are needed, according to the Air Force study, and more than that number of late-model B-52s are available.

Or, the "stretched TFX" — a proposed enlarged version of the controversial tactical bomber — might be used.

Gen. Curtis LeMay, Air Force chief of staff, says the TFX is too small and has too short a range, but the plane could carry all of the AMSA equipment (except for an oversized radar antenna) and could hit almost all AMSA targets, most of which are in European Russia.

Or, the new A-11, the mystery plane, could be modified as a bomber. It has range, speed and more size than the TFX.

The proposed AMSA gross weight is 350,000 pounds. The TFX is about 65,000, and the A-11 is estimated at about 100,000. The B-52 weighs 480,000 pounds.

The Air Force strongly rejects these substitutes and believes that an early start on AMSA is needed as insurance against unforeseeable military problems in the future.

The civilians ask, however, whether the premium on the AMSA policy would exceed the face value.